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indifference which the Nupe ascribe to divine creation. Yet since the world contains both things, *kuti*, which is good, and *cigbe*, which is both good and evil, the good would seem on balance to preponderate. As we shall see, various other religious thoughts confirm this impression of a cynicism tempered with optimism.

(iv) *Body and Soul*

We turn to the other 'things in the world' and first to the animate beings. Each of these possesses, to begin with, a body, *nakā*. The Nupe word means precisely what we mean by 'body'—the flesh and blood of living creatures, resulting from procreation, parturition, and natural growth, and decomposing after death. The biological processes of procreation and parturition are fairly well understood, though this empirical knowledge is not free from fallacies. Thus no one misunderstands the connection between coitus and conception; one understands, too, that both women and men can be infertile, and that abortion can be brought about by strong laxatives or overstrain. At the same time the Nupe also use certain purely 'magical' cures for barrenness and charms or magic belts to prevent conception. More surprisingly, the Nupe fail to distinguish between semen and male urine, or have to borrow a word from Hausa to describe the former. Nor finally is the precise length of pregnancy known. To quote one of my informants, a diviner and knowledgeable old man: 'It all depends; it may take anything between seven months and a year; a strong and fit child will be born after eleven months or so, a weak one after a shorter period.'

The biological processes as such, one believes, produce only a lifeless body, as death in turn leaves the body lifeless but still physically intact. The living being thus has further attributes, of soul-like nature, which are three in number: *rayi* or 'anima'; *fifingi* or 'shadow soul'; and *kuci* or 'personal soul'.

The word *rayi* is used generally to denote the living state; the pulse, for example, is called *rayigi*, 'little life'. Everything animate possesses *rayi*, while stones, pieces of wood, and similar inanimate objects are without *rayi*; growing trees and plants, however, are counted among the animate things. Life comes from God and exists with God, in the sky, when it is not incarnate. At death 'God takes it away'; at birth it is sent down by God, more precisely, it appears already when the child first moves in the womb. The new life is thus at first tied to the life of the mother, and in a sense remains so tied for a period even after birth. For the mother who has borne one child must not risk another conception before the child can walk and is 'sufficiently strong', lest it would never grow up; so that its *rayi* would seem to be diminished by the other life

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that is growing in the mother.[1] Though this notion is not fully thought out, this much is clear: the *rayi* is a quantity, which increases with growth and diminishes with old age and in all forms of illness; it is impersonal, without sex or individual features; it is common to and infinitely divisible among all animate beings. It is a life principle or life soul, the Latin *anima*, and nothing more specific or personal. All that is peculiar to the individual human being, his appearance, his character, his particular spirit and intellect, comes from the two other entities, *fifingi* and, especially, *kuci*.

As death represents the complete severance of body and *anima*, so disease weakens the link and attacks the life principle. In sleep, body and life soul are separated temporarily and more lightly; normally, the *rayi* will return to the body; but one cannot predict that this will always happen, so that a person may die in his sleep. It is then, incidentally, when the life soul is loosened from the body, that it can be harmed by witches, who, as we shall hear, 'feed' on the *rayi*. When I dream, my *rayi* wanders about and sees all the things that come to me in the dream. But the *rayi* does not wander alone; it takes something with it that is, though not of the body, yet of bodily shape; for I may appear to others in their dreams, as in turn I dream of other persons. It is not, of course, the real, full person that is met with in dreams (for the real person may be away in other parts, or asleep at home), but only his or her image or shadow—the *fifingi*.

Fifingi means 'shadow' much as we understand the word, that is, the shadow thrown by men and animals, not the shade caused by inanimate things. But the word has a second, mystic, meaning, best translated as 'shadow soul'; for when a person dies and his body decomposes the *fifingi* continues to exist and will still be visible (as in our dreams of dead people). Normally, nothing further can be said about the *fifingi*; beyond appearing in dreams it has no effectiveness. It is not identical with the dead whose disembodied souls may act as the guardians of the living or be invoked in sacrifices: these souls or spirits represent that other entity, the *kuci*, to which we shall presently return. But in certain cases the *fifingi*, too, are active after death; they are said to find no rest, to haunt houses or localities, scare travellers, and to cause nightmares when they visit people in their dreams. This happens when a person, having died an unnatural death or in a strange place, was buried without the proper rites; in which case a symbolic burial *in absentia* will lay the ghost. More vaguely one also believes that evil persons are similarly condemned to wander about restlessly after death. In either case, however, it is not really

[1] This rule refers specifically to conception, not to sexual intercourse; for the parents may practise *coitus interruptus*.

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the *fifingi* which acts in this fashion, although one may loosely use this term; for in the cases just described the shadow soul turns into something else—a *farâ*, a ghost or spirit.

As I have already suggested, the *kuci* corresponds to something like a 'personal soul'. But this is an obscure conception, and all informants will at some stage of the discussion plead ignorance or the presence of a final mystery. The Nupe believe in reincarnation, the souls of the dead being re-embodied in their offspring; it is these transmuted souls which are called *kuci*. One does not in this connection think of distant and perhaps unknown ancestors, but of great-grandparents or even grandparents reborn in their children's children. The rebirth can occur in either line of descent, which fits well into the Nupe kinship system with its strong emphasis on bilateral descent. Whether the ancestors are paternal or maternal, as they are reborn, so their personal qualities, of character (good or bad) as well as physical likeness, reappear. The body, *nakã*, is thus partly shaped by the ancestral soul or *kuci*, which is said to 'enter' it much as a fluid or substance enters a vessel (while the *rayi* does not 'enter' the body but merely gives life to it).

The *kuci* appears in the act of birth, that is, it 'enters' a body already possessing life, and the new-born is in fact called 'a *kuci*', unnamed. For a time body, life soul, and *kuci* are not yet firmly united. Body and life soul merge fully when the umbilical cord is cut; but the *kuci* will not be in full harmony with the other two until it has been identified by divination and the infant's name (which is the name of the reincarnated ancestor) has been pronounced for the first time. The crying of the babe, too, will cease at that moment, since it is only a sign that the new-born senses the initial disharmony. In other words, the three components of the living being become reconciled when the link between human vessel and ancestral soul is acknowledged socially, that is, by the symbol of a name. Only then does the *kuci* lose its other-worldly nature and become fully of this world; while the infant is from then on a person, and not only a breathing body. Henceforth it will be called *egi*, child, and no longer *kuci*, disembodied soul or spirit. The *kuci* therefore adds to the *anima* or life soul a 'personal soul', which is also the carrier of heredity and of kinship continuity.

It is difficult to say just how personal this soul concept is. It is certainly specifically human; for animals have no *kuci*, as they have no names or kin groups. Yet the relationship between the ancestral *kuci* and its reincarnation is not of a one-to-one kind. The same ancestral soul may animate numerous progeny, all living at the same time; indeed, it is said that there 'is no limit' to the number of simultaneous incarnations of the same *kuci*. Here,

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then, the *kuci* appears as an impersonal principle of descent and heredity, even as something like a biological strain mystically interpreted. It is consistent with this latter conception that the *kuci* should be held to be sexless, so that the soul of either grandparent may appear in offspring of either sex. This theory, however, is belied in practice; for I have found few personal names that can be given both to males and females; rather are male and female names sharply distinguished, which would presuppose the opposed assumption of a sex-linked reincarnation. And once, when I was present during the divination of the *kuci* of a new-born child and commented on the likely identity of the *ndakó* (grandfather) in question, the diviner corrected me, pointing out that the child was a girl and that her soul would therefore come from a *nnakó* (grandmother).

The two conceptions, of a 'personal' and of a 'kinship soul', conflict, above all, in the beliefs concerning their fate after death. At death, the *kuci* is said to leave the body and to return to God, if only temporarily, until it finds a new incarnation. Yet it is also said to stay on earth, watching over its kinsfolk in the manner of a guardian spirit and ready to come to their aid in various ways. The *kuci*, incidentally, does so indirectly, having no power of its own, but acting in some fashion through *Sokó*. To enlist the aid of the *kuci*, one performs special sacrifices (*labá*) in the house or on the grave of this or that ancestor. Now, such a belief in the souls or spirits of the dead which, while not at the time incarnated, interest themselves in their surviving kin, would seem to reconcile satisfactorily the two conceptions of a personal soul and one bound to lines of descent. But Nupe belief failed to work out a consistent solution on these lines. Thus the ancestral sacrifices are performed both on the grave of the grandfather most recently dead (and hence hardly yet reincarnated) and on the grave of the most remote known ancestor (who will surely have found a new body). And if, in the latter case, one knows of one outstanding person among the ancestors, the sacrifice will be addressed to him. On the other hand, one need not sacrifice to any particular, named ancestor at all; often, the people address an anonymous *kuci*, that is, the souls of the dead in a generic sense. This is done invariably, in an informal fashion, whenever one drinks beer; then a small libation is poured on the ground, for a *kuci* no further defined.

There is no orthodox answer to the question how the *kuci* can be 'with God' and on earth at the same time, or how it can influence God when it has already entered upon another incarnation. When pursuing this point I received these diverse replies. A first informant made the revolutionary suggestion that there might be two *Sokó*, one in the sky, the other on earth; needless to say, this

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of Mokwa, true to the fiction of the 'pact', held a formal court, trying the animal for breaking the pact and passing sentence of death.[1] The power of Mokwa over crocodiles is well known all over Nupe country and, today at least, unrivalled. The village of Katcha, on a tributary of the Niger, apparently had a 'sacred crocodile' in the past; but the charm had failed to work and, less faithful to their cult (or less optimistic) than the people of Mokwa, the people of Katcha abandoned the practice.

My second instance comes from Pichi, a small village near Bida, and concerns a spirit said to be embodied in the leopards of that locality. Surprisingly, it is identified with one of the early chiefs of Pichi, many generations back, and known by his name, *Ndakó Yisa*, Grandfather Yisa; but since all Nupe invariably refer to leopards in this circuitous and respectful manner, and since Yisa is an extremely common name, I am inclined to regard this quasi-totemic interpretation as apocryphal. Nor is the belief very positively stated or accompanied by special rituals. The people believe, however, that no leopard will attack a person of Pichi, and in turn refrain from molesting the animal, even if it kills their dogs or goats.

If animals ever played a more momentous role in the Nupe universe, there is little evidence of it today. Some disconnected 'superstitions' and a few suggestions in folklore are the only instances of this kind. Thus the Nupe believe that animals, like men, have 'spirit doubles' (of which more presently) and that certain animals are also possessed of quasi-human or superhuman faculties. The attitude towards leopards is a case in point. Most villagers are convinced that if the respectful, indirect reference to 'Grandfather Yisa' were omitted, the leopards in the neighbourhood would be annoyed by this 'lack of courtesy' and would surely attack the village (though strict observance of the rule would not make them more amenable or friendly); but no attempt is made to explain the belief or to relate it to some other, more fundamental, tenet of the creed. Much the same applies to 'Father Tortoise', *Ndakpa*, who is the hero of numerous tales, in which he plays the part of a would-be clever fellow who runs into various adventures, either amusing or containing a moral. A small red beetle which appears at the beginning of the rains is called *Sokó*, which odd nomenclature elicits only this comment: 'Since the

[1] The people told me afterwards that the crocodile had in fact died; when I pointed out that I had since seen it in the stream, I was assured that it was 'a different one'. The people of Jebba Island, incidentally, claimed that the river ritual *ketsá* similarly protected all riverain people from crocodiles; which claim was ridiculed by the proud owners of the crocodile cult in Mokwa, who at once recalled that three years previously a Kede man from the river had been killed by a crocodile.

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insect heralds the season, it must surely be sent by God.' We may mention finally that the decorations of houses and the ornaments on leather or carved wood frequently display the outline figures of the 'mythical' animals leopard, tortoise, or crocodile; again, no deeper significance attaches to them; also, today at least, the figures of 'ordinary' animals as well as other designs are as often employed, being all meant 'for amusement only'.

The most interesting variety of spirits is also the one least clearly conceived. This is the personal spirit or spirit double, which belongs to every person from birth until death and cannot be shed or changed. Men have male, women female, spirit doubles, and both can be either good or evil; there is no accounting for the latter fact, which rests entirely 'with God'. The spirits are also of unequal strength and often jealous of one another, forcing their own feelings of hostility upon their human counterparts. The success of a marriage, for example, will be determined by the manner in which the spirit doubles happen to agree. But the spirits are responsible only for the luck and fate of their human twins, not for their character or morals. A friendly spirit will protect its human twin; it will, for example, betray to him in sleep or dream the name of witches who try to harm him. More generally, the 'good' spirit can give wealth, prosperity, and success in everything, at least as much as its strength permits; a weak spirit might well fail in all these attempts; while 'bad' spirits would intentionally make their twins suffer nightmares, illness, and misfortune of all kinds.

Not every illness is of spirit origin; the illness which readily responds to treatment or has a well-understood physical origin (breaking one's leg, food poisoning, and the like), has nothing to do with spirits. Only stubborn or frequent ailments of obscure origin, and especially mental diseases, are ascribed to the spirit doubles. But again, this does not apply to every form of mental disorder. Thus the Nupe define idiocy in what are to them rational terms, as a mere 'deficiency' (*eti a gbà o*—'the head is insufficient'), and point out that it often goes together with bodily deformities. Like the latter, mental deficiency 'simply happens', for example, owing to some carelessness of the expectant mother. 'Raving lunacy', however, is invariably caused by spirits; and, let us note this, since the spirit doubles are part of divine creation, lunacy, being their gift, is ultimately a gift of God. Yet madmen are in no way vessels of divinity; rather are they instances of the misfortunes and evils which God inscrutably dispenses.

The belief in spirit doubles leads to curious consequences. If the power and morals of the spirit determine the success in life of its human double without determining also the character or morals of

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that human, it follows that good spirits can be wedded to evil persons and vice versa. 'Good' spirits might therefore grant success to the most evil machinations, and 'bad' spirits frustrate the best intentions of their human twins. Also, a good person, tied to a good but weak spirit, cannot hope to escape misfortune; while the misfortunes of an evil person who happens to possess an evil spirit double would be as blindly bestowed. All this fits well into a universe which *ab initio* contains good and evil, fortune and misfortune, without moral reasons. But here, in the realm of concrete personal fate, the amorality of the creed is most clearly noticeable. Yet it is so only for us; the Nupe worry little about the ethical issues. Only in one respect do they face these issues and resolve them by admitting this exception to the general rule: Witches always have evil spirit doubles, and these exercise their power, not against their human twins, but against the victims of the latter. But this modification of the spirit belief is slight; for the evilness of the spirit does not make the witch a witch; his or her evil nature is simply given and only aided by the congenial spirit.

A few of the men with whom I discussed these questions seemed prepared to reinterpret the belief in personal spirits more thoroughly. They held that all spirit doubles were 'good', not morally, but in the sense that they served their twins as best as they could. As the spirits were weak or strong, so they would be capable or incapable of gaining success for the human beings, whatever the morals of the latter. These were the views of a minority, and far from correcting the moral ambiguity of the creed they only added to its cynicism. But they seem to indicate a desire to correct another weakness in the creed, which strikes us as forcibly, namely, the supererogatory character of the spirit belief. Clearly, there is no need to make the spirits good and evil as well as weak and strong; the former distinction adds nothing in the way of explanations which the latter does not already furnish.

In a wider sense, the whole conception of personal spirits seems redundant since it accounts for nothing that is not already accounted for by other agencies. Owing to the spirits the human beings meet with fortune and misfortune; but the same fortuitous dispensation of good things and bad is ascribed to the very nature of the created world. The spirit doubles account for nightmares or helpful dreams, but so do the *fifingi* and *kuci*; they bring about illness, but this may equally be due to the weakening of *rayi*, to the attacks of witches, or (as we shall see) to acts of God. The spirit doubles cause afflictions of the mind, but these may again come from God or be rooted in the human body. Altogether, the Nupe creed seems without economy; diverse agencies are introduced to explain the same phenomena, and diverse supernatural

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aids are made to overlap in their aims or concerns. Thus one sacrifices to spirits, twins, kinship souls, and, through rituals, to God himself; or one uses *cigbe*; and one does so for the same reasons —to secure prosperity, to protect oneself from illness, or to safeguard fertility of man or nature. Even so, there is some design and order in this confusing picture; the Nupe universe is not entirely a random array of entities and mystic forces, but something of a cosmos. We shall, by way of a summary, try and outline its features.

4. RELIGION AND POLITY

First, however, I must mention an important figure in the Nupe creed which falls into none of the categories so far discussed—Tsoede or Edegi, the legendary first King of Nupe. The tradition of Tsoede and its essentially political symbolism has been discussed elsewhere, so that here a few remarks will suffice.[1]

Tsoede's memory survives in an elaborate cycle of myths, the only instance of this kind in Nupe; several rituals and sacred objects (an iron chain, brass bangles worn by chiefs, the bronze figures mentioned before) are said to have been his creation; and a specific cult also bears his name. Similar observances also exist, here and there, in the villages, relating to the ancestors of hereditary chiefs; they, too, are sometimes regarded as the founders of their communities or as the initiators of particular cults, their *kuci* being invoked in regular ceremonials. But Tsoede is much more than an ancestor chief magnified, and the rituals called after him do more than merely summon up his memory. Nor is it the *kuci* of Tsoede which is invoked. The concrete ties of descent, implicit in the worship of *kuci*, are obviously absent between the ancestor king and the vast, nation-wide congregation of his cult, while his 'personal soul' has no part in any cycle of rebirth.[2] In the rituals of Tsoede it is he himself who is invoked, so that he may intervene with *Sokó* on behalf of his people. The precise circumstances of this intervention are neither explained nor pictured in any way; yet one knows that it is more powerful as well as active than that accessible to *kuci* (which are merely 'watched by God').

If Tsoede is not a *kuci*, neither is he a 'spirit' nor *aljénu*. He represents, in fact, a figure outside the general framework of Nupe religion and a conception both anomalous and unique in Nupe

[1] See *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 72–76, 141–2.

[2] Tsoede is said to have been harelipped, and every Nupe child born with a harelip is still named after him. But this custom only serves to keep his memory alive; for it has no further consequences and does not imply any belief in Tsoede's reincarnation.